

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 30, 2012

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Vice Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations,
and Related Programs
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations,
and Related Programs
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Inouye, Vice Chairman Cochran, Chairman Leahy and Ranking Member Graham:

As you begin work on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations bill, we write to urge you to include an extension of the "Lautenberg Amendment" —a critical lifeline for individuals fleeing religious persecution.

The Lautenberg Amendment began as part of the Foreign Operations Appropriations Act for FY 1990, for religious minorities in the Soviet Union fleeing persecution. In 2003, Congress expanded the protection of the Lautenberg Amendment to include Iranian religious minorities. According to the Department of State, over 400,000 religious minorities from the Former Soviet Union and Iran have been able to enter the U.S. under the Lautenberg Amendment.

The Iranian government remains one of the world's worst human rights violators and has intensified its systematic persecution of religious minorities. Every year since the enactment of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, the President has designated Iran as a Country of Particular Concern for religious freedom violations. In its September 2011 International Religious Freedom Report for Iran, the Department of State cited the government for creating "a threatening atmosphere for nearly all non-Shia religious groups, most notably for Baha'is, as well as Sufi Muslims, evangelical Christians, Jews, and Shia groups that do not share the government's official religious views." In addition, the March 2012 report by the Special Rapporteur for Iran at the U.N. Human Rights Council highlighted the "systematic persecution of members of unrecognized religious communities, particularly the Baha'i community, in violation of international conventions" and noted that 474 Baha'is had been arrested since August 2004. Seven Iranian Baha'i leaders ("the Yaran") have been imprisoned since 2008 on 20-year sentences.

It is critical that the Lautenberg Amendment be extended promptly, as it would demonstrate the U.S. commitment to human rights and religious freedom in Iran. Without the Lautenberg Amendment providing a safe means of exit, Iranian religious minorities could be forced to cross the border to Turkey or Pakistan, where conditions for asylum seekers (particularly non-Muslims) are extremely unsafe, and access to resettlement is uncertain.

We urge you to renew the Lautenberg Amendment and maintain this critical lifeline in the FY 2013 State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Appropriations bill. Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,


FRANK R. LAUTENBERG


MARK KIRK


RICHARD J. DURBIN


ROY BLUNT

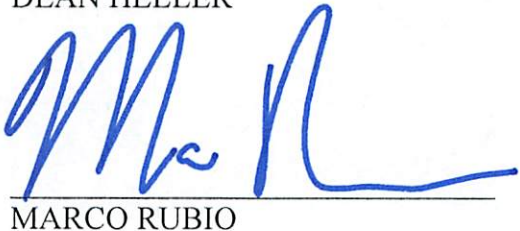

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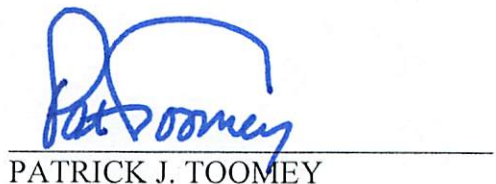

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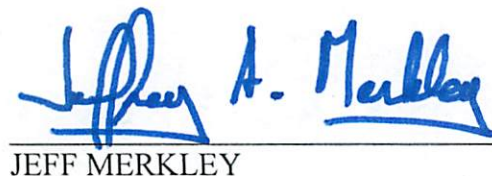

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